



GRAI MATTERS

April/May 2010

Welcome

Welcome to our first new-look newsletter for 2010. The newsletter contains a rundown both of GRAI activities and also broader issues on LGBTI ageing. Firstly, thank you for your continued support of GRAI. Although GRAI is a small member-based organisation, we always seem to have more than enough to keep us busy – and 2010 will be no different. GRAI's **social research grant** is proceeding well (see later article). Look out for the launch of the final report and the best practice guidelines due out in the next few months. I am fortunate to be off to Sydney for the Health in Difference conference and then Melbourne to the International Federation of Ageing conference. I will be able to profile the work of GRAI and also be able to discuss a range of gay research issues nationally. It can sometimes feel a bit isolated working in WA but rest assured GRAI is highly regarded on the national gay ageing front.

Jude Comfort
Chair GRAI

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**GRAI is urgently
looking for an
auditor**

CPA? Are you our man/woman?

GRAI is seeking a (paid) Auditor for our accounts. GRAI's accounts are very simple, amounting to around 100 transactions each year. If you can provide this service for us, please contact:

Stuart Pekin | GRAI Treasurer
Email: skp@iinet.net.au ■

GRAI site goes AWOL

□ DAMIAN DOUGLAS-MEYER

You may have been to the GRAI website at www.grai.org.au in the past few weeks and found it not functioning. We apologise for this - the previous owner of the server that hosted our site had removed it from their server without letting us know, and without giving us the ability to move it to a new host server!

We've begun painstakingly re-building a new site and now have that operating on www.grai.org.au. We will be adding more to this site over the next few weeks and months. If you have anything interesting that you think we should link to on our site, please email info@grai.org.au and we will check it out.

Damian Douglas-Meyer | GRAI webmaster ■

GRAI Matters Newsletter, GRAI PO Box 715, Mt Lawley, 6929
info@grai.org www.grai.org

On GRAI's recent agenda

□ JUDE COMFORT

GRAI continues to feature on the national stage with recent contributions to the following:

- *Beyondblue GLBTI Round Table* in December 2009 (regrettably, with no funding to cover travel, I joined the Round Table via teleconference only). See the website for more details on the outcomes of this.
- GRAI will take part in the *LGBT symposium at the International Federation of Ageing* conference to be held in Melbourne in May this year (with speakers from Australia, the UK and the USA).
- GRAI's research project will be profiled in an aged care forum as part of the *Health in Difference Conference* May 2010. More details at <http://www.lgbthealth.org.au/health-in-difference-our-work>
- GRAI is involved in the *Same Sex Law Reform Working Party* which has received Federal Government funding to develop and implement the '**Wear it with pride**' campaign. This campaign provides information on the 85 pieces of legislation which have been amended to accommodate GLBT people. See the media release from ACON at <http://www.acon.org.au/about-acon/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2009/52> and follow the link there for more detail. These changes have impacted on many LGBT people, particularly older LGBT people in domestic relationships. A series of information sheets has also been developed. The one relating to ageing and health is found at <http://www.wearitwithpride.com.au/law-reforms/health-ageing/>
- GRAI contributed to the development of the *WA Equality Before the Law Bench Book* which provides guidance to the entire WA court system – criminal and civil, and all levels of courts. The Bench Book also has application to tribunals, providing WA judicial officers with statistics and information about different groups of people in relation to values, cultures, lifestyles, socioeconomic disadvantage, and potential barriers in relation to full and equitable participation in court proceedings. Particularly worth looking at are Chapter Six: *Older people* and Chapter Twelve: *Diverse sexuality, sex and gender*. GRAI has been acknowledged as having input into this important document.

"GRAI will take part in the LGBT symposium at the International Federation of Ageing conference to be held in Melbourne in May."

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The Bench Book is available at

<http://www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au/content/news/media/publications.aspx> .

As can be seen from this run-down, the Internet provides a wealth of information for us all. If you want to see some inspiring work in the area of LGBT ageing, have a look at the USA SAGE (Services for Ageing GLBTI Elders) site, <http://www.sageusa.org/index.cfm> . The sizeable population of GLBTI elders in the USA means they have been able to set up specific LGBTI services and receive government funding to do so. Although the scale is very different to that in WA or Australia there are valuable lessons and resources to share. Another great resource a little closer to home, that passed my desk recently, comes from **Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria**. Entitled *Well Proud - A guide to GLBTI inclusive practice for health and human services*, this report draws on national and international research on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI people and on guidelines for GLBTI-sensitive practice and service delivery that have been developed here and overseas. This report is found at <http://www.glhv.org.au/node/589>. We certainly look forward to a time when these guidelines become an accepted norm in all health environments, and it is our mission to help make this a reality as soon as possible. ■

Pennies from heaven (Hypothetically... if we had \$50,000 annually, what would we spend it on?)

□ STEVE SINGER

The GRAI Board was asked by a previous AGM to look at the issue of bequests and trust funds. To tackle the issue, we decided that we'd invoke some of those oh-so-fashionable management techniques that abounded in the 1990s where one imagines success and then works backwards to the present. Therefore, rather than knuckle down and look at the hard part first, as in "where's the money going to come from?", we got our creative juices flowing and just assumed that some generous donor had provided GRAI with an endowment of \$50,000 per year. The next hardest question is "what would we do with the money?" And again, the GRAI board skipped the hard work on that question by deciding to Ask the Members for their ideas. And to make it even easier for us, and to make sure we don't bias the responses in any way, We're Not Going To Give You Any Clues.

So, dear GRAI member, we ask for your ideas: If GRAI had secure, long-term funding of \$50,000 per year, what would you like the Board to consider doing with it? Please let us know in the next few weeks by replying to info@grai.org.au or by posting a note to GRAI at PO Box 715, Mt Lawley, 6929.

Cheers,

Steve | GRAI Secretary ■

"Hypothetically... if we had \$50,000 annually, what would we spend it on?"

Curtin Health Innovation
Research Institute

Curtin
University of Technology

lotterywest
supported

GRAI's Research Project - report update

Hi, everyone!

Let me introduce myself. My name is Rita Freijah and I am the Research Officer working on the Lotterywest supported GRAI project '*Accommodation Options For Older GLBTI Individuals*'. I've been working on the project since it started in April 2009 and I must say that it's great to be involved in such an important issue and I've really enjoyed it so far.

Last year we designed a survey and sent it to residential aged care providers in Western Australia. This included retirement villages and low and high care nursing homes. The survey was looking at current practices, policies and attitudes of providers in relation to GLBTI residents. The survey responses came back at the end of 2009 and were analysed in January 2010. From the initial findings, it is fair to say that very few providers are aware of any GLBTI residents currently in their facilities, and also that they failed to recognise older GLBTI individuals as a specific needs group. We also found that very few providers were aware of the Federal Government's same sex legislation.

Following the survey findings, we held a focus group with some managers of residential facilities. The focus group aimed to further explore some of the general concepts we received from the surveys such as: 'we treat everybody the same' and 'sexual preference is none of our business.'

Currently, the information received from the focus group and surveys are being put together in a report. They are also being used to develop some **best practice guidelines** for the residential aged care sector around specific needs of GLBTI residents. A small focus group of GRAI members has reviewed these, however if any members would like to have a look at these and comment on them, please contact me.

I'll be providing you with further project updates in the next issue of this newsletter. However if you have any questions in the meanwhile, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best regards

Rita Freijah | AOFOG Research Officer

Phone: 9266 1832, Email: r.freijah@curtin.edu.au ■

Want to be involved?
Call for new board
members

If you would like to be more involved in the operation of GRAI, we have two vacancies on the GRAI board that need filling. Please feel free to contact one of the Board members or myself if you would like to know what is involved in this. The Board is always open to ideas and suggestions from our members: see Steve's hypothetical on what we would do if we had some money, for a start.

GRAI will continue to provide advocacy and information on the range of issues facing older GLBTI people in the community. The main ways we stay in touch with our membership are through our website at www.grai.org.au and this newsletter, which we hope to get out to members four times a year – but, of course, feel free to contact us any time with your news and views!

Jude Comfort | GRAI Chairperson

Email: info@grai.org ■

Sexy seniors need to play it safe

□ SARAH WHYTE

Sydney Morning Herald, February 21, 2010



Illustration: Matt Golding

SAFE-SEX workshops should be held in aged-care facilities and staff trained to manage promiscuous behaviour as a sexual revolution breaks out among the elderly, experts say.

Health and aged-care professionals report a jump in the number of over-65s leading an active sex life, including having multiple partners.

"We are experiencing an awareness of sexual relations in later life that has not been previously seen," University of New England faculty dean, Professor Victor Minichiello, said.

"Increasingly, the younger cohort of older people who are moving into retirement villages are healthy, in relationships, or able to develop new relationships," Professor Minichiello said. Council on the Ageing and aged-care associations are calling for "safe sex" workshops and guideline policies to be implemented in aged-care and retirement facilities to help staff.

"Sexuality in older Australians is perfectly normal and should be treated as such," NSW Aged Care Association executive director Charles Wurf said.

"Older Australians need to be supported in their choices of sexuality and there is a need for sexual health information for elderly residents."

Council spokeswoman Anne-Maire Elias said over-65s were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than their children.

"They were a generation who missed out on all the safe-sex education that was going on when this generation were in their 50s," she said.

"We love that these older people are sexually active but, with an increase in Viagra and multiple partners, aged-care facilities should welcome safe-sex workshops for their residents."

Ken Gleeson, a behavioural consultant at The Whiddon Group, will publish his guideline policy document, *Sexuality in the Elderly: Intimacy and Sexual Policy*, later this year.

Mr Gleeson said aged-care staff tended to put sexual behaviour among the elderly in the "too hard" basket.

"There is a widespread belief among aged-care workers that the elderly should not be participating in sexual activities and there is currently no policy to address sexual behaviour in aged-care facilities," he said. *The Sun-Herald* asked 15 aged-care facilities about the sexual habits of residents. None felt comfortable discussing the issue publicly. One retirement village in Sydney's north reported several recent marriages among residents.

Research in Western Australia shows sexual activity among the 82 to 87 age group is "reasonably common". Professor Leon Flicker, of the University of Western Australia, completed a survey of 320 men and women in late 2008, with men showing greater sexual activity than women due largely to the greater availability of a partner.

Online dating service RSVP, which is owned by Fairfax Media, publisher of *The Sun-Herald*, reports that its "Over 50 and Fabulous" group is one of its fastest growing, with 13,500 "very active" members. ■

LGBT Carer Support Group Alzheimer's Association

□ VIRGINIA HAILES & ALEXI GRAMMATIKOS

My name is Virginia Hailes, I am a counsellor at Alzheimer's Australia in Perth and a GRAI Community Board Member. Over the 9 years that I have been with Alzheimer's WA, I have often wondered where are all the GLBTI carers of someone with dementia?

Currently 19,000 people in WA have been diagnosed with dementia, and we can assume that 950-1900 of these will be GLBTI people. (This is based on the accepted 5-10% of the population being homosexual). We can also assume that a similar number of people *who care for a person with dementia* will also be members of the GLTBI community, whether as partners of GLTBI people or as carers of their heterosexual relatives.

According to future population projections produced by Access Economics, an estimated 79,000 people will have a dementia in WA by 2050: therefore we can estimate there will be between 3950 and 7900 GLBTI carers.

There is anecdotal evidence that GLBTI carers frequently face invisibility or discrimination by health professionals. The negative contact carers may receive can result in them not seeking support due to their needs hardly ever being addressed. For example, a GLTBI carer may avoid discussion of a personal problem that might meet with an unsympathetic or embarrassed response. There is also an assumption that carers are usually married and have 'normal' family dynamics. Consequently a Carer Support Group made up of heterosexual carers, may not be useful for a GLTBI carer.

In 9 years, only 3 individuals have identified themselves to the organisation as being GLBTI carers, which has always bothered me. So Alexi and I have been trying to put together a specific GLBTI Carer Support Group and need your help. At the moment we have 2 lesbians who are interested in attending, but to make it viable we would love to have more.

A Carer Support Group is an opportunity for other carers to come together in a safe setting. We usually run for 2 hours each month, but this is flexible according to the needs of the members.

We hope that you will think about this, maybe filter this out into the wider community and feel comfortable to contact Alexi or myself so we can start this special Support Group.

Cheers

Virginia & Alexi

Direct: (08) 9388 2800 (Alexi) | email: alexi.grammatikos@alzheimers.asn.au ■

Seeking Nursing Home Visitor for Gay Man

As a result of our current research project with aged care accommodation facilities GRAI has received a request from a Perth nursing home (south of the river). They have a younger gay man in care who would really like to have some gay male visitors. This is the first time we have had such a request and no doubt we were contacted after this agency completed the survey and they found out about the existence and work of GRAI.

GRAI is not specifically geared up to be a service delivery organisation. However I think it is important that within the community we are able to respond to requests such as this. Surely this is part of what the research project is about – building bridges between the aged care sector and the LGBT community. We have therefore decided to put the request out to a couple of community agencies and through our own GRAI member base. If any member is interested in visiting this man can you please contact the chair of GRAI directly j.comfort@curtin.edu.au or 0422 654 244? I hope we are able to help this man and maybe reduce his isolation.

Jude Comfort | GRAI Chairperson

New Australian study looks at older lesbian and gay people's Care Networks



□ MARK HUGHES AND SUE KENTLYN, University of Queensland

A new study, called 'Diversity and Older People's Care Networks', is looking at the ways paid and unpaid carers come together to provide support to older lesbian and gay people. This reflects the growing awareness across Australia of the issues confronting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people as they grow older. A broad coalition of support – including LGBT seniors, LGBT community organisations, aged care providers, and university researchers – is emerging to challenge existing practices and promote social inclusion for all older people.

Invisibility leads to discrimination

A key issue is the general invisibility of LGBT people in the health and aged care systems. If service providers assume older people are heterosexual (or asexual) or that gender identity is simply biological, then the particular experiences and needs of LGBT people will be ignored.

For many LGBT people, a lifetime of discrimination means that they expect to be discriminated against when accessing services and supports in later life. A study by the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC) in 2008 identified that 65% of the LGBT people surveyed were concerned that their sexuality or gender identity would affect the quality of aged care or carers' services provided to them. Thus, a major concern is that this expectation of discrimination leads to a failure to access needed services or to hiding one's sexual or gender identity when in contact with these services.

While much of the discussion in the LGBT community has focused on the provision of LGBT-specific residential and retirement homes, the reality is that for most older LGBT people – as with other older Australians – care will be delivered through networks of community-based providers, including unpaid carers. However, care-giving is typically understood as a family activity undertaken by opposite-sex partners and adult children. There is relatively little understanding of non-traditional care-giving relationships and dynamics, such as the care provided by friends and how friends move from social support to caring roles. In the QAHC survey, LGBT people reported that they expected to gain emotional, physical and financial support from a wide range of parties, including same-sex partners, LGBT friends, heterosexual friends, community agencies and, to a lesser degree, siblings, extended family members and adult children.

This new study, led by Mark Hughes and Sue Kentlyn, is looking at the diversity of the care networks of lesbian and gay people aged 60 and over, and how care providers respond to these persons' sexual identity. The research involves interviews with the older lesbian or gay person, as well as their paid and unpaid carers.

You can participate

If you or someone you know would like to participate in this exciting new research project, please contact *Dr Mark Hughes* (Email: m.hughes5@uq.edu.au or phone: 0405 386 976) or *Ms Sue Kentlyn* (Email: dryad@internode.on.net or phone: 07 3379 7273) for more information. Participants are assured of complete confidentiality. Also, perhaps you could display the enclosed flier somewhere, or pass it on to a friend?

This project has been funded by the University of Queensland and approved by the University of Queensland Ethics Committee. ■